



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Education Children and Young People Committee

Graeme Dey MSP

T3.60

Minister for Higher and Further Education,
and Minister for Veterans
Scottish Government

The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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By email only—

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31 May 2023

Dear Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the Education, Children, and Young People Committee regarding your evidence session on the 2023/24 budget on 17 May. The Committee would like to thank you for a helpful evidence session. The Committee acknowledges your openness and directness as well as your engagement with Committee members. The Official Report of the meeting can be found [here](#); relevant column numbers are set out below.

Funding the teachers' pay settlement

During the evidence session, you stated that the reversal of the uplift to the budget for Further and Higher Education for 2023/24 by £46 million was 'principally about the teachers' pay settlement'. You also stated that the total amount needed to cover the settlement is £188 million. At the meeting, you gave a commitment to write to the Committee to provide further information on where the rest of the funding is coming from within the education budget to fund the teachers' pay settlement (cols 2-3). The Committee notes that this remains a work in progress. The Committee asks you to provide any further information which is available at this stage and to provide updates

on this work as it progresses; the Committee also requests that the Scottish Government provides a timescale for this work.

Education Directorate outturn

At the meeting, the Committee heard that the skills and education portfolio net operating costs outturn for 2021/22 was £47 million against a budget of £43.6 million. You were asked about:

- the total operating cost outturn for the Education Directorate 2022/23 and 2023/24,
- by how much the Scottish Government anticipates that there will be an overspend, as has been happening in previous years, and
- what work can be done to identify efficiencies to be made in that budget line (cols 10-11).

The Committee asks you to provide a response on these points. The Committee also asks you to provide a response in relation to potential efficiencies and to confirm when the Scottish Government will be able to provide the data for 2022/23.

Future governance of Glasgow college region

At the meeting, you indicated that the Scottish Government was considering options for future governance of the Glasgow college region, including the future of Glasgow College Board. You confirmed that the latest figures for 2021/22 running costs for the board are £675,000. When asked how this funding would be reallocated should the board be abolished, you confirmed that a decision has not yet been taken. You gave a commitment to write to the Committee in full in due course (cols 11-12). The Committee asks that you provide a timescale for decisions regarding the future governance of Glasgow college region and that you keep the Committee updated on this work.

Flexibilities and college funding

During the session, you set out some of the measures you have implemented to provide colleges with more flexibility in managing their budgets and indicated that this work is ongoing (cols 14-14). The Committee asks you to provide updates on this work as it evolves.

Future policy landscape

During the evidence session, you were asked about a number of outstanding policies, such as the international strategy for the higher education sector, the purpose and principles statement and the report on the skills delivery landscape. You indicated that the Scottish Government wants to have, across the education and skills landscape, a 'coherent narrative and a clear direction' (cols 18-19).

The Committee asks you:

- to clarify the timescales for completion of outstanding publications, including the International Strategy for the higher education sector, the Purpose and Principles Statement and the Withers report on the skills delivery landscape,
- for an update on whether the consultation on the Purpose and Principles Statement has now closed, and
- to provide a timescale for the provision of the annual letter of direction to the Scottish Funding Council and explain the delay in issuing the guidance.

The Committee notes your commitment to providing regular updates on this work.

Trade union representatives on college boards

When asked about industrial relations within the further and higher education sectors, you acknowledged that relations were not good; you also stated that your instinct is that trade unions should be represented on college boards (cols 15-16). Following the consultation on the addition of trade union nominees to the boards of college institutions, which closed on 27 January 2023, the Committee asks you to provide an update on the outcome of the consultation and when the Scottish Government expects to reach a decision on the inclusion of trade union representatives on college boards.

Scottish-domiciled students studying in England

During the meeting, you were asked about the number of Scottish-domiciled students who go to university in England. You made a commitment to provide figures to the Committee (cols 22-23). The Committee asks you to provide these figures.

College redundancies

During the evidence session, some Members highlighted forthcoming redundancies in colleges, as a result of the budget cuts. The Committee asks you to confirm whether the Scottish Government is proactively tracking and monitoring:

- ongoing voluntary/compulsory redundancies in colleges and across the tertiary sector, and
- the impact of this in relation to course availability at different levels (i.e., access, HNC/HND) and learning pathways.

The Committee would welcome a response to this letter by Thursday 15 June 2023.

Yours sincerely



Sue Webber MSP

Convener